

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY PRAGUE

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INFO AMEMBASSY BELGRADE

AMEMBASSY BERLIN

AMEMBASSY BUCHAREST

AMEMBASSY BUDAPEST

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY SOFIA

AMEMBASSY WARSAW

S E C R E T PRAGUE 0140

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PARM PFOR MASS XG CZ

SUBJECT: DEPARTMENTAL STUDY OF THIRD WORLD CONVENTIONAL
ARMS SUPPLY RESTRAINTS

REF: STATE 011673

1. ALTHOUGH CZECHOSLOVAKIA IS (AND HAS BEEN FOR MANY YEARS) A MAJOR MANUFACTURER AND EXPORTER OF ARMAMENTS, EMBASSY HAS NO PRIVATE PIPELINE THROUGH WHICH TO OBTAIN INSIDE INFORMATION ON CZECHOSLOVAKIA'S ARMS TRADE. AS DEPARTMENT WILL ALSO REALIZE, THIS SUBJECT--WHICH IN MOST COUNTRIES IS TREATED CIRCUMSPECTLY--IS EVEN LESS PUBLICIZED IN THIS SECRETIVE SOCIETY. OUR FILES ON ARMS TRADE, WHILE THUS RATHER SPARSE, NEVERTHELESS CONTAIN SOME INTERESTING POINTS. MOST RECENT SUMMARY WHICH WE HAVE SEEN ON THIS SUBJECT IS CONTAINED IN RFE SITUATION REPORT/15 DATED 16 APRIL 1975. ACCORDING TO THIS APPARENTLY EXCELLENT PIECE OF RESEARCH, COMMUNIST GOVERNMENT WHICH CAME TO POWER IN 1948 HAS CONTINUED CZECHOSLOVAK ARMAMENT TRADE WITH
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VIRTUALLY NO REGARD FOR POLITICAL IDEOLOGY OF RECIPIENTS, AND

SINCE THAT TIME LIST OF NON-COMMUNIST CUSTOMERS LITERALLY HAS RUN FROM A (ADEN) TO Z (ZAIRE). AS INDICATION OF LACK OF IDEOLOGICAL BASIS OF THIS TRADE, CZECHOSLOVAKIS SUPPLIED ARMS TO NIGERIA WHILE AT THE SAME TIME AIDING BIAFRA; GOC ALSO SUPPLIED ARMS TO ERITREAN INSURGENTS WHILE MAINTAINING GOOD RELATIONS WITH ETHIOPIA.

2. WITH CAVEATS MENTIONED IN PARAGRAPH ONE OF THIS MESSAGE, EMBASSY REPLIES TO SPECIFIC QUESTIONS POSED REFTTEL ARE AS FOLLOWS: A) PRIMARY MOTIVATION OF GOC IN ARMS TRANSFERS IS ECONOMIC. ACCORDING TO ACDA REPORT TO CONGRESS DATED JANUARY 1973, CZECHOSLOVAK EXPORTS OF ARMAMENTS FROM 1961 TO 1971 TOTALED 1,248 MILLION DOLLARS. OF THAT AMOUNT, 450 MILLION WORTH WAS SENT TO DEVELOPING COUNTRIES. THUS WE WOULD EXPECT GOC, OTHER THINGS BEING EQUAL, TO BE DISTINCTLY

UNRESPONSIVE TO ANY INITIATIVE WHICH MIGHT CURTAIL THIS LUCRATIVE SOURCE OF HARD CURRENCY. (OBVIOUSLY THERE IS ALSO POLITICAL GAIN FROM THE COMMUNIST COUNTRIES FROM MANY CZECH ARMS SALES, E.G., TO INDIA. BUT ARMS SALES ARE PROBABLY MORE IMPORTANT TO THE ECONOMY OF CSSR THAN ANY OTHER COMMUNIST COUNTRY: THIS ELEMENT THUS COMES FIRST.) B) WE DO NOT THINK THAT GOC WOULD BE MORE RESPONSIVE TO ONE TYPE OF RESTRAINT THAN TO ANOTHER, NOR THAT THE GOC WOULD REACT FAVORABLY TO AN INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON THE SUBJECT NOR TO ITS DISCUSSION IN OTHER FORUMS. C) THERE ARE NO FORESEEABLE DEVELOPMENTS ON THE POLITICAL HORIZON WHICH MIGHT CHANGE THIS ATTITUDE. WE QUALIFIED THIS ANSWER WITH THE PHARSE "OTHER THINGS BEING EQUAL". SHOULD THE SOVIET UNION, FOR WHATEVER REASON, DECIDE THAT IT WAS IN ITS INTEREST TO IN FACT LIMIT THE ARMS TRADE, CZECHOSLOVAKIS WOULD OF COURSE BOW TO THAT DECISION. WE FEEL, HOWEVER, THAT THEY MIGHT PROTEST MORE STRONGLY TO THE SOVIETS THAN THEY WOULD NORMALLY DO IN MATTERS OF MUTUAL INTEREST.

3. AS POINTED OUT ABOVE, CZECHOSLOVAKIA HAS A LONG, LUCRATIVE AND NON-IDEOLOGICAL HISTORY IN THE ARMS TRADE. CZECHS HAVE SERVED AS FRONT MEN FOR SOVIETS IN MANY CASES (MOST SPECTACULARLY IN EGYPT IN 1956), BUT THIS IS MERELY AN ADDENDUM TO THEIR OWN EFFORTS IN THEIR OWN BEHALF. CZECHS WILL TAKE INSTRUCTIONS FROM SOVIETS IN THIS AS IN OTHER SPHERES, BUT
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CHIEF POINT IS THAT CSSR IS VERY BIG IN ARMS SALES IN ITS OWN BEHALF OVER AND ABOVE WHAT SOVIETS ASK THEM TO DO.

4. IT DOES NOT APPEAR THAT THE TRANSFER OF WEAPONS TO NON-WARSAW PACT COUNTRIES HAS AFFECTED CZECHOSLOVAKIA'S MILITARY POSTURE. ONE POSSIBLE EXCEPTION TO THIS GENERAL RULE MIGHT BE THE CASE OF THE L-39 TRAINING AIRCRAFT. THE CZECHS HAVE EXPORTED LARGE NUMBERS OF THESE AND DAO ESTIMATES THAT THEY MAY

NOW IN FACT BE SUFFERING A DOMESTIC SHORTAGE.

5. WHILE WE HAVE NO FIRM EVIDENCE THAT CZECHOSLOVAKIA RESENTS SOVIET TRANSFERS OF MODERN WEAPONS SYSTEMS WHICH HAVE NOT BEEN SUPPLIED HERE, WE ASSUME THAT IN FACT SUCH RESENTMENT MUST EXIST (PARTICULARLY AMONG THE MILITARY). PERHAPS THE PRIME EXAMPLE WOULD BE THE UP-TO-DATE ANTI-AIRCRAFT SYSTEMS, INCLUDING THE SA-6, WHICH HAVE BEEN SUPPLIED TO EGYPT, SYRIA AND IRAQ. APART FROM A COUPLE OF PIECES SUPPLIED FOR THE NATIONAL DAY MILITARY PARADE LAST MAY, CZECHOSLOVAKIA HAS YET TO SEE SUCH EQUIPMENT.
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